

Your Honor,

I have no excuse for being here. I regret my actions more than I can ever express. It's not just because of the personal shame and consequences, but because of how my crimes have affected so many. My victims are the first and last thoughts I have every day, and it is my sincerest hope that this resolution will provide them some form of closure.

I loved being a teacher - I loved it with all my heart. I used to put in 70-plus hour workweeks, perfecting lesson plans, volunteering for extra-curriculars, and just being available to my students. I would spend Saturdays writing letters of recommendation and helping with college essays or AP prep. I would spend my lunch hour tutoring or just talking to students, helping them through their issues and being available. I did this all with the sole intention of living out my vocation and being a good teacher. With all my heart, I wanted to make a positive impact on my students' lives, and the community in general.

When I was arrested, my first thought was how this would hurt my students. The most painful part of this case has been reading the interviews and the social media posts in the discovery from the students who I deeply, deeply cared about, who I invested in. Reading about their pain and disappointment in this haunts me - I just roll it over and over in my head. I so much want them to know that the positive words of encouragement, the investment and care I felt for them was real. It was all real. But as good of

a teacher as I wanted to be, I am a wounded man, who did terrible things, terrible things that I deeply, deeply regret. And with all my being I regret hurting them.

The past year and a half that I have spent in county jail has offered me ample time for self-reflection. I have spent my time reading, praying, and meditating. Books like "Man's Search for Meaning" and "The Book of Joy" have focused me on the few things in life that truly matter. They have helped me keep the focus on what matters most. In addition, "The Body Keeps the Score" and "The ABC Approach to Anxiety" have opened my eyes to how much I have been repressing over the years, how my coping skills have been completely self-destructive, and how much work I truly need to do. Finally, the Bible has given me hope for forgiveness (even if I don't yet forgive myself). This time of intense introspection and reading has revealed a path forward to me.

My arrest was, in so many ways, a life-saving blessing. I know that my depression and my struggles with anxiety had gotten unmanageable. I was in a dark place, spending hours locked in the bathroom and doing all I could to keep it together. My wife had intervened on New Years, and lovingly made me promise to get help, to go see someone. And she wasn't alone. My parents and friends had made comments about my need for help. But I was too private, too consumed, and too afraid to confront and unpack it all, so I just stuffed it. I just swallowed the pain. I doubt many people call their arrest and future in prison a blessing, but for me it was. With my arrest

came help. It wasn't so much the secret of what I was doing being revealed, but that I could not run from, or ignore, how bad things were internally anymore.

Over the past year or so, I have been able to get some professional help. The counselors have focused on my anxiety and depression by giving me coping strategies. Coupled with my reading and meditation and prayer, I have tried to make the best of my limited resources, and I hope to expand this in the future. One of the great blessings of my time reflecting was me taking an inventory of what I value most and how I'd allowed even that to be corrupted.

I've always centered my identity around serving others. In many ways, I used that for years as a means of running from my problems - my marriage was struggling, so instead of coming home and being present I signed up to coach Mock Trial. It's hard to separate my desire to serve from my struggles. Clearly, I was doing all I could to run from my issues and adopted some maladaptive coping mechanisms - I drank to excess, I locked myself away for hours at a time, and I violated my students' and colleagues' privacy with these videos. All of it is shameful and hurtful to so many people. Reflecting on this, I have come to see that my heart and soul needed to serve but I also need to be real and honest and refuse the facade that led me to this.

I have come to grips with how bad my depression and my anxiety are, but I also see that I have things to offer. But to offer anything first demands that I am honest. From there, I can serve. Here, I have been honest with inmates and staff about who I am and how I am. From that vulnerable place, I have been able to serve and teach. In Dane County I was able to help other inmates with the HSED and GED prep.

It was among the most rewarding aspects of my teaching, even if it did fill me with memories of what I've lost. The joy in seeing someone know they'd passed was almost - in some ways better - than hearing about the talented students getting into a great school.

I am still figuring out how to balance my need to heal and seek help with my desire to serve. It is my hope that prison will offer a chance to further work on my mental health and maybe even help my fellow inmates in a greater capacity. I want to address the root causes of my behavior so I may combat them.

When I do get out, not only do I hope to work for the community that I live in, but I will do my best to repair the damage done to that community. It is my sincerest hope, that years down the line, my victims will read about me in the paper. They will rightfully say: he was a creep and a jerk and just the worst. All of that true. But I hope that they will see that I am living

a life of penance and service. I hope they will see and come to understand that the terrible things I did don't define them or undermine everything I tried and wanted to do for them. That day may never come, but I do hope that through this sentence and through the life I live after my release that the victims will have a sense of closure and healing. I am aware that you don't know me your honor, and may not believe this, but every day I pray for my victims. They are always in my heart, and I hope that this sentence brings them healing.

Sincerely,
James Earl Ray